

WOLVES

I can't talk to you without talking about wolves. And I don't mean to imply that you are wolves. On the matter of wolves: A year ago, this body voted overwhelmingly in support of Wyoming's wolf management plan in what was referred to as House Bill 229. Those of you who were here will recall that that was a difficult bill, and it wasn't written in a vacuum, and it was passed solely based upon the assurance in writing from the Department of Interior that the bill was acceptable.

Subsequent to that, a plan was developed by the Game and Fish Department, and then the review of that plan was undertaken by the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Fish and Wildlife Service picked a panel of scientists to review it. That panel, by a 10-to-1 margin, deemed our plan to be scientifically sound. Now the Department of the Interior has changed its mind, and three weeks ago we were informed that our plan was suddenly not acceptable. We were asked to meet yet another list of requirements. The federal government made it clear that their objection was not on a scientific basis, but upon some vaguely defined "legal risk analysis."

A couple of things I want to make clear. One is that, if somebody tells you that this is about semantics, it is not about semantics. This is about our ability to manage the wolf in this state. It is not simply whether you use the word predator or not. I don't care what you call them. You can call them marshmallows; you can call them federally introduced species in this state. What I care about are the parameters for management of that population, and this revision of the Interior Department position significantly modifies and significantly weakens the state's ability to manage that population. That's why we're at loggerheads. I have asked for permission to distribute to you a rather lengthy letter that I sent to the Secretary of Interior. I hope that you will take time to read it. As we proceed over the next week, we will be engaged in discussions with the Department of Interior in the hopes of avoiding litigation, and I am involving legislative leaders in it.

Here's the bottom line for me. I want to see that species delisted, but it is not delisting at any price. If the consequence of agreeing to this plan, as currently given to us by Interior, is to not give us the authority to manage that species in the state, then it is not an effective delisting. It is not about delisting – we all support delisting.

It is about the terms under which delisting will occur in Wyoming, and it does not seem to me that on a semi-political, legal-risk basis that the state of Wyoming should abandon a plan that was based on a statute that the Interior Department said was adequate, that the scientists have said was adequate, unless there is an incredibly good reason, none of which I've heard to date. We expect some conversations tomorrow and over the next week, and we will report back to you as to the results of those. All I would say on that is, as you go through this, when somebody comes to you and says this is about semantics, it's about the word predator, it is not about the word predator – it is about getting delisting on a rational basis.

You're going to be asked to consider some legislation to slightly modify House Bill 229. I would ask that you consider that, because it aligns the law exactly without our plan. There are those

who intend to oppose that legislation and are lobbying against it on the premise that they don't want anything changed. I will tell you that the real premise is that they don't like the Game and Fish Department. I am not one of those who find our Game and Fish Department to be less than adequate. I would encourage you to trust those professionals. Make the legislation happen. Give us a chance, if we have to go to court, to have a statute that exactly parallels the plan that we have in place. I know you guys are as tired of hearing me talk about this as I am of talking about it.

I do want to talk just a minute about why I think this is important, and I don't mean just the wolf issue. We gather here and we talk about individual issues and the information piles up on our desks and pretty soon the emotions run high and we hear the siren call of partisanship or the siren call of House vs. Senate or the siren call of one issue vs. another. Pretty soon we get all wrapped around the axle. I find I do the same thing, so what I try to do is once in a while take a step back, take a deep breath and remember what's important in our lives and what's important about the work that we do.